



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

11 September 2023

Afghanistan

Security situation

At the Torkham border crossing between Afghanistan and Pakistan, fire was exchanged between security forces of both countries on 06.09.23. According to Pakistani authorities, the Taliban had set up a checkpoint in a restricted area and responded to Pakistani objections by firing. According to the Taliban, the first shots were fired by the Pakistani border posts. Two Taliban and two Pakistani soldiers were reportedly killed. The border crossing, which is also important for freight traffic, was closed. According to a report by exile media Hasht-e Sobh on 08.09.23, the Taliban are withdrawing fighters from checkpoints in Panjshir province and moving them to the borders with Pakistan and Iran.

Persecution situation

Citing local sources, it was reported on 05.09.23 that a Taliban commander had forcibly seized local people's land in Takhar province to dig for gold.

An officer of the former army was found shot dead in his flat on 07.09.23. The background is unclear. According to a report on 08.09.23, the Taliban arrested, tortured and then shot a former officer in Kapisa province. He had allegedly been arrested three times before on charges of collaborating with the National Resistance Front (NRF). According to a report on 09.09.23, the Taliban killed a former soldier and another man in Balkh province on charges of kidnapping. On 11.09.23, the Taliban reportedly arrested a student in Takhar province on charges of collaborating with the NRF. A report of 08.09.23 said that Taliban killed one person in Kandahar during an argument.

A report by HRW dated 08.09.23 categorises the Taliban's policy towards women and girls as "gender-based persecution" and thus a crime against humanity.

Economic and humanitarian situation

According to the WFP, humanitarian aid for another two million people will have to be cut. Due to a lack of funding, a total of 10 million needy people cannot be supported with food aid. In the main harvest season, it is foreseeable that important harvests such as wheat will reach a more acceptable level than last year but will still remain below average. Thus, food insecurity persists and is most serious in the northern and north-eastern provinces. At the same time, the Taliban-appointed Deputy Prime Minister Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar described the economic situation as stable at an economic conference with local and international businessmen in Kabul on 06.09.23. The value of the Afghani to the US dollar has increased. However, it is assumed that the exchange rate has been artificially controlled rather than that the economic situation has improved sustainably.

Benin

Nigerian journalist arrested

Members of the Benin Police arrested and detained Nigerian journalist Damilola Ayeni of the Foundation for Investigative Journalism (FIJ) in Benin's north-western Pendjari National Park on 31.08.23 after he took photos for his reporting on environmental protection. Police had accused the journalist of involvement with a jihadist group, according to media reports. On 07.09.23, the Committee to Protect Journalists demanded the immediate release and dropping of the charges against the journalist. He was released on 08.09.23 after efforts by the media, the Nigerian Embassy in Benin and legal counsel.

Burkina Faso

Dozens killed in terrorist attack

On 04.09.23, members of the al-Qaeda group Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) killed more than 50 security forces in northern Burkina Faso, near the border to Mali and Niger, according to the Burkinabe government. The victims included both military personnel and paramilitary volunteers. About 30 others were injured. The Burkinabe military is trying to resettle displaced people in the town of Koumbri in Yatenga province. According to media reports, about half of Burkina Faso's territory is now under the control of terrorist groups.

For its part, the Burkinabe army said it had killed at least 100 armed actors designated as terrorists in two operations in the north of the country near the borders with Mali and Niger on 01.09.23. Five security forces were also killed, according to media reports. Reports of this kind are not uncommon in Burkina Faso (cf. BN of 21.08.23 and 28.08.23). Since 2015, Burkina Faso has been trying to push back the growing influence of armed groups, including jihadist groups such as IS or the al-Qaeda terrorist network. More than two million people are said to have fled within the country.

Côte d'Ivoire

Presidential party leading in local and regional elections

According to media reports, President Alassane Ouattara's party, Rassemblement des Houphouëtistes pour la démocratie et la paix (RHDP), won 60% of the municipalities and 80% of the regions in the local and regional elections on 02.09.23. The two main opponents, Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) and Parti des peuples africains - Côte d'Ivoire (PPA-CI), thus suffered a defeat, although they had made agreements in advance with regard to individual municipalities or regions. One victory for the RHDP was, for example, that Prime Minister Patrick Achi defended his office as chair of the regional council of La Mé (Lagunes district). The simultaneous holding of offices or mandates at different levels is common. The election process was calm.

DR Congo

Military personnel in court after anti-UN demonstration

On 05.09.23, the trial of six Congolese soldiers arrested in connection with the killing of several civilians during a protest in Goma began at the city's military tribunal. The military had violently dispersed the protest against the UN peacekeeping mission on 30.08.23, killing at least 48 civilians (cf. BN of 04.09.23). According to media reports, two senior officers among the accused gave orders to open fire on the protesters. The charges against the six soldiers are crimes against humanity and disobeying orders. One of the accused had commented and denied the charges, the reports said.

UN: Alarming situation in the country's east

The UN reports a significant deterioration in the humanitarian situation in eastern Congo over the last 18 months. Numerous armed groups continue to threaten many communities in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri provinces, displacing thousands of people. Eight million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Across the country, up to 26 million people need food assistance.

On 05.09.23, a UNICEF report on the east of the country stated that there are currently few worse places to be a child. Children there are exposed to threats such as rape, abduction and recruitment by armed groups on a daily basis. The report came after two infants were found abandoned and rigged with explosive devices.

In the Ituri region, the village of Balingina fell victim to an armed attack on 06.09.23. Suspected Mai-Mai militias killed 17 people. The media reported overcrowded camps for displaced people in the region. The people there are desperate and see no hope for peace after many years of violence. According to the UN, about 40 % of the people in Ituri have been displaced from their homes.

Egypt

Warning of population growth - action called for

As reported by various media, President al-Sisi called for measures against population growth in the country at the first Global Congress on Population, Health and Development on 05.09.23. He said that otherwise the state would not be able to maintain services and infrastructure at current levels. As one measure, he proposed China's one-child policy. He thus contradicted a statement by the responsible minister that the issue of children was a free choice.

Eritrea / Diaspora

Outbreaks of violence between Eritreans in the diaspora

Since July 2023, there have been repeated clashes between supporters of the Eritrean government and opponents of the regime in several cities around the world, with injuries on both sides as well as among local police forces. The clashes were occasioned by so-called Eritrean festivals to which pro-regime organisers invited people. These Eritrean cultural festivals (Mahbere-Kom) had already taken place in the past, but recently more and more opposition activists called for counterdemonstrations and protests, claiming that the festivals were propaganda events. Violent clashes took place in Giessen/Germany, Stockholm, Zurich, Bergen, Copenhagen, Tel Aviv, Seattle, Edmonton and other cities. Local media reported street fighting with hundreds of injured and numerous arrests, although some of the festivals had already been banned in advance for security reasons.

The conflict between opponents of the regime and those loyal to it has been going on for decades. Several tens of thousands of Eritreans are living in a large number of countries. Many of them sought refuge abroad during the war of independence (1961-1991) and during the border war with Ethiopia (1998-2000). Some support the Eritrean government under President Isaias Afwerki, who has ruled the country since its official independence in 1993. In contrast, there are mainly younger refugees who have left the country in recent years.

According to a German news source, the "Brigade N'Hamedu" is behind the protests at least in Germany, but it is said that its leader is not Eritrean, but an Ethiopian from the regional state of Tigray. A representative of the German Bundestag is also quoted as saying that the counterdemonstration at the Eritrea Festival in Giessen was applied for by an Ethiopian. A final report was announced for the end of October 2023. In turn, Israeli media reported that a militia group allied with the Eritrean government, Eri-Mekhet, had been trained and partly equipped with weapons in the run-up to the event in Tel Aviv. Apart from Eri-Mekhet, other violent militias abroad are said to be linked to the Eritrean state party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). Eri-Blood, 4G and 52 are mentioned in this context. In return, the Eritrean government accuses the Israeli intelligence agency abroad, Mossad, of fomenting unrest "in order to divide the Eritrean people."

Ethiopia

UNHCR: Over 183 dead in unrest in Amhara

According to UNHCR, at least 183 people have been killed in violent clashes between regional militias (Fano) and the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) in Amhara Regional State (cf. BN of 07.08.23, 14.08.23 and 21.08.23) since July 2023. According to local news sources, the number of civilian casualties is said to be much higher because of the artillery shelling of residential areas. No reliable information is available due to an internet blockade, the interruption of telephone connections and because media professionals do not have access to the region.

In addition, during the same period, more than 1,000 people - mostly young Amhara - were arbitrarily arrested on the basis of the state of emergency imposed (cf. BN of 07.08.23). Also, mass searches of houses began and media workers reporting on the situation in Amhara were detained since the beginning of August 2023. This is according to an UNHCR statement of 29.08.23 which goes on to say that all of this indicates that the human rights situation in Ethiopia has deteriorated and calls on all parties to stop killings, abuses and other violations and to seek dialogue.

Government troops allegedly responsible for indiscriminate killings and looting in Amhara

On 08.09.23, various media reported that the ENDF killed more than 70 civilians and looted property in Majete town (North Shewa zone, Amhara). This was preceded by heavy fighting between the army and Fano. Survivors said the victims had been unarmed farmers. According to a local source, the ENDF shot dead 15 young men in Ensaro town (North Shewa, Amhara) at the end of August 2023. The source said that the victims were tied up and suspected of supporting Fano, which temporarily controlled the town.

Sexual violence continues in Tigray

AI reported that even after the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoH) concluded in November 2022 in the regional state of Tigray (cf. BN of 07.11.22), sexual violence against women and girls has continued, resulting in numerous unwanted pregnancies and HIV infections. The perpetrators are military and paramilitary groups which, according to the accusation, are "most likely linked to the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea".

The Gambia

Reference cases: First convictions for FGM

According to media reports, a magistrate's court found three women guilty of genital mutilation (FGM) of eight girls between four and twelve months of age. Each of them was sentenced to fines of 15,000 Dalasi (about 231 EUR, as of 08.09.23), or alternatively to one year in prison, the reports said. The court thus remained below the legal minimum penalty. The cases represent the first convictions for FGM in The Gambia, which has been banned and criminalised since 2015. The convicts are a traditional circumciser who performed FGM in violation of an oath she took in 2013 (cf. BN of 06.02.23) and the mothers of the genitally mutilated girls. They had been arrested in January 2023 in the eastern part of the Central River Region. No information is available on the ethnicity of the girls and mothers. Nor is there any information on the forms of FGM applied according to the WHO classification.

The Gambia Committee against Traditional Practices (GAMCOTRAP) welcomed the rulings. Related hereto, the NGO pointed out that there are indications that some families are taking their children from the capital region of Banjul to rural areas during the current school holidays in order to subject them to FGM.

Abdullah Fatty, former imam at the State House mosque under former President Yahya Jammeh and a Muslim scholar who is said to remain particularly influential in largely Muslim Gambia, criticised the rulings. He further described the FGM campaigns in the country as an attack on Islam. Fatty and other religious actors again defended the practice of FGM, citing religious reasons (cf. BN of 06.02.23). They also paid the fine for the three convicts. The former vice-president of The Gambia, Isatou Touray, called for Fatty's arrest because of his public statements. According to Touray and the chairperson of the Safe Hands for Girls Foundation and FGM activist Jaha Dukureh, Fatty's statements included calls for violence against FGM activists.

The National Youth Parliament of The Gambia (NYP) expressed concern at the support of religious leaders for maintaining the practice of circumcision in the country and paying the fines imposed. NYP called on the government to continue its efforts to enforce the ban on FGM.

Tear gas used against demonstrators; Popular opposition figure on trial

According to media reports, on 07.09.23 police forces used tear gas against protesters who expressed their solidarity with the accused opposition member Yankuba Darboe outside a court in Banjul. A media outlet reported that the use of tear gas by police was related to an attempt by his supporters to gain access to the court premises. Darboe, a member of the main opposition United Democratic Party (UDP) and one of the former leaders of the civil society protest movement 3 Years Jotna, which was banned by the government in 2020 (cf. BN of 15.02.21), has been indicted on charges of sedition and public insults since 2021. His supporters and some political and civil society observers believe the charges are politically motivated. Darboe has been an elected councillor of the Brikama Area

Council since the 2023 local government elections and chairs the council. A leading member of the 3 Years Jotna, on the other hand, insinuates a connection with Darboe's activism for the banned opposition movement that protested against President Adama Barrow in late 2019 and early 2020. According to media reports, the trigger for the indictment were Darboe's disparaging and derogatory remarks, for which he later apologised. The indictment states that in February 2021, Darboe allegedly called President Barrow a "stupid and clueless dictator" and also made derogatory and disrespectful comments about the judiciary. The criminal proceedings against Darboe and the other leaders of the 3 Years Jotna were dropped in 2021 (cf. BN of 10.05.21).

Guinea

Deaths during protests mark the second anniversary of the military coup

The association of opposition groups and civil society groups calling itself "Forces vives" had called for peaceful protests on 05.09.23, two years after the ruling military junta had seized power. According to media reports, the first clashes with the security forces took place in Conakry on the evening of 04.09.23. More followed on 05.09.23. According to Forces vives, four young men between the ages of 15 and 18 were killed; numerous others suffered gunshot wounds at the hands of security forces. Since June 2022, security forces had killed a total of 30 people during protests, 108 had been injured by firearms and hundreds had been arrested, Forces vives reported afterwards. On 13.05.22, the junta had pronounced a general ban for protests in public spaces (cf. BN of 16.05.22).

Iran

State measures in the run-up to possible protest events

According to media reports, the Iranian leadership is stepping up measures to prevent protests commemorating the death of Mahsa Amini, which is considered to have triggered nationwide protests in 2022 (cf. BN of 19.09.22). Several people have already been arrested in recent weeks, including an Amini uncle and family members of protesters who died during the protests. Checkpoints were set up in various cities and additional security forces were deployed in the provinces of Kordestan and West Azerbaijan, where protest participation was particularly strong. In addition, several university teachers critical of the regime, including at least ten professors, were suspended. Universities are sometimes considered the starting points for the largely decentralised organisation of protests. Sources in university circles said that local security agencies summoned students to make them sign pledges not to participate in protests. In some cases, students were threatened with arrest for not following the summons, they said.

Six miners remain in detention after protests

Foreign media report that six miners from the Agh-Dareh gold and stone mines (West Azerbaijan province) remain in detention in the provincial capital of Orumiyeh following their arrest during local protests in August 2023. 32 mineworkers were arrested after a rally over unpaid wages that had resulted in clashes with police forces. 26 people have been released on bail in recent weeks. According to press reports, the charges against the men who are still in custody include disturbing public order, acts against national security and kidnapping.

Freedom of the press: press medium banned

According to media reports, a news portal was banned by the press regulator on 04.09.23. The news website Entekhab, which is considered reform-oriented, violated the press law by publishing a video report in August 2023, the media reported. Among other things, Entekhab's report criticised the foreign policy of the government under President Raisi, which is oriented towards China and Russia. The justification for imposing the ban was that the report was illegal and contrary to the country's national interests.

Conviction of two female journalists

According to media reports on 03.09.23, two female journalists were sentenced to three years in prison each. According to their lawyer, the prison sentences for the charges of "conspiracy and collusion" were suspended on a pro-rata basis. Thus, the women will have to spend only about one month in prison. The rest of the sentence will

be suspended for five years on the condition that the journalists attend a course on professional ethics and do not leave the country.

Iraq

PKK-Türkiye conflict

According to the Director General for Counter-Terrorism in Kurdistan, two PKK fighters were killed in a drone attack in Mawat district (Sulaymaniyya province) on 09.09.23. A fire broke out as a result of the attacks, no civilian casualties were reported.

This is already the second alleged attack by the Turkish military on targets in Sulaymaniyya within eight days (cf. BN of 04.09.23). In fact, the Turkish military operation to fight the PKK focuses geographically on the border districts with Türkiye in the province of Dohuk.

On 10.09.23, combat helicopters, suspected to be Turkish, attacked a rural area in Amadiya district (Dohuk province). As a result, ground fighting broke out between the Turkish military and the PKK. Details of personal injury or property damage are not yet known.

Lebanon

Fighting in Ain al-Hilwa

Since 07.07.23, tensions in the Palestinian refugee camp of Ain al-Hilwa have turned violent again. The fighting left at least five people dead and 52 wounded, including both militiamen and civilians. In addition, three shells hit a Lebanese army checkpoint and injured three soldiers, one of them seriously.

UNRWA tried to accommodate residents who had fled the camp in a tent city near Sidon. However, the local authorities closed it down. Currently, many residents are staying in shelters improvised by UNRWA. According to recent reports, a ceasefire has been agreed.

Mali

Dozens dead in several attacks in the north

Suspected members of Islamist groups killed at least 64 people and injured others in several attacks in the country's north on 07.09.23. This is according to information from the Malian military government. For the first time a passenger ship on the Niger River was attacked and 49 civilians died. The passenger ship, a common means of transport during the rainy season in the region, was on its way from Gao to Mopti. The subsequent attack on a military camp in Bourem County in the Gao region left 15 military personnel dead. In addition, a military base in Gao was targeted by a suicide attack on 08.09.23. The number of victims is not yet known. According to the army, about 50 terrorists were "neutralised" in the counter-attacks. The jihadist group JNIM, which is linked to al-Qaeda, claimed responsibility for some of the attacks.

Morocco

Earthquake - high number of victims feared

According to media reports, a powerful earthquake shook the region south-west of Marrakesh on 08.09.23. As of today, at least 2,100 people have lost their lives. In total, an estimated 300,000 people have been affected in the remote mountainous region. Rescue and recovery operations are ongoing.

Mexico

Supreme Court ruling decriminalises abortions at federal level

The Supreme Court handed down a ruling classifying the criminalisation of abortion as unconstitutional and ordered a corresponding amendment of the penal code and the ruling's implementation. Step by step twelve federal

states have already fully decriminalised abortions in recent years, but in 20 states abortions were still possible only in a few exceptional cases.

Namibia

Humanitarian situation

According to the latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) for Namibia dated 06.09.23, 579,000 people are classified as acutely food insecure (IPC class three or higher) for the period July to September 2023. According to the report, 22% of the population are affected, with 13,000 people classified in IPC four and 566,000 people in IPC three. Only two regions of the country were classified at level two. Level five is not applicable. A classification higher than IPC three includes an urgent recommendation to take action to fill the existing gaps in food supply. A forecast for the period October 2023 to March 2024 expects the situation to deteriorate. Accordingly, 65,000 people are expected to be in stage four and 630,000 in stage three. Climate changes, a decline in economic performance and rising prices are cited as causes for the poor status quo and the expected development of the humanitarian situation.

Niger

Thousands demanding withdrawal of French troops

Thousands of people demonstrated on 02.09.23 near a military base of French soldiers in Niamey and in Ouallam, in the country's south-west, demanding the withdrawal of around 1,500 members of the French army. According to media reports, they followed the call of a coalition of civil society organisations supporting the military coup. Some protesters reportedly tried to enter the military base. The protests were triggered by new arrivals at the military base. Prior to the military coup, French military personnel had been deployed alongside Nigerien forces against al-Qaeda and IS. France does not recognise the government that was formed after the military coup on 26.07.23. The current military government accuses France of destabilising the country and of "obvious interference" by supporting the ousted president Bazoum.

Airspace reopened

Niger's military rulers reopened the country's airspace to commercial flights on 04.09.23, according to media reports. After seizing power on 26.07.23, the coup plotters had closed the airspace after ousting the democratically elected President Mohammed Bazoum. The airspace had first been reopened on 02.08.23, then closed again on 06.08.23 after countries in the region had threatened a military intervention.

Nigeria

Court ruling on the confirmation of the presidential election

On 06.09.23, the Nigerian election court rejected the challenge of the February 2023 presidential election and confirmed the victory of Bola Tinubu (cf. BN of 06.03.23). Nigeria's opposition candidates Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Peter Obi of the Nigerian Labour Party (LP) had applied to the court to declare the election invalid, according to media reports of 06.09.23. Reasons for challenging the last presidential elections are said to be electoral fraud and the failure of the electoral authority to publish the results electronically (cf. BN of 06.03.23). According to media reports, Abubakar will appeal the court ruling and will not accept Tinubu's election victory. Since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, no challenge of any presidential election result has been successful. Already on 21.03.23, a challenge filed against the presidential election result was rejected by the competent electoral court by direction of the Nigerian electoral authority Inec (cf. BN of 17.04.23).

Katsina State: Fatalities and abductions

Violent actors described as terrorists killed seven people and abducted 12 others in an attack on a village in Sabuwa Local Government Area (LGA) of Katsina State on 05.09.23. This is according to a media report. Several people were reportedly injured. The armed actors were also said to be responsible for cattle rustling in the community. Since

the beginning of 2022, the Nigerian government designates violent actors in the region as terrorists (cf. BN of 10.01.22). Sabuwa LGA borders Kaduna State and, according to media reports, is not infrequently affected by attacks of armed groups.

North Macedonia

Alleged theft of cancer drugs by hospital doctors

According to recent media reports, the Skopje Public Prosecutor's Office confirmed on 02.09.23 that the police had seized documents and computers during a court-ordered search at the Skopje Clinic for Oncology and Radiology and at two private residences on the day before. The clinic is the most important institution for the treatment of cancer patients in North Macedonia. According to the public prosecutor's office, investigative research and other factors justified an initial suspicion of criminal abuse, theft and organised black market trading of life-saving cancer drugs at the Skopje special clinic, in which parts of the clinic's medical and nursing staff are allegedly involved. The state leadership as well as citizens, media and the medical profession of the country responded to the revelations with indignation; which was expressed including by a protest held in Skopje on 04.09.23. On 04.09.23, President Stevo Pendarovski described the alleged criminal offence as "shocking" and called for an end to the "culture of impunity".

Pakistan

Security situation

According to the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), the number of security-related incidents in August 2023 was the highest in any one month since November 2014. PICSS documented 99 attacks nationwide, which could be verified by independent sources. Most of the attacks continued to occur in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, particularly in the tribal districts on the border with Afghanistan, as well as in Balochistan province. In the attacks verified by PICSS, 112 civilians and security forces were killed and 87 others injured. Security forces accounted for half of all fatalities and 63% of those injured. On the other hand, in August 2023, security forces killed at least 24 suspected militants and arrested 69 others in nationwide battles described as anti-terror operations by the government. PICSS had documented 54 attacks in July 2023,

Fighting in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On 06.09.23, the main Afghan-Pakistani border crossing at Torkham was closed after an exchange of fire between Afghan Taliban and Pakistani forces, according to security sources. On 07.09.23, the Prime Minister of the interim government, Anwaarul Haq Kakar, informed that this was followed by raids to curb cross-border smuggling.

On 06.09.23, four Pakistani soldiers and twelve armed fighters of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) were killed in fighting near the Pakistan-Afghan border. According to the Pakistani military, the TTP members, equipped with state-of-the-art weapons, had attacked two military checkpoints in Chitral district. The attacks had been coordinated from the Afghan provinces of Kunar and Nuristan, the military said.

On 09.09.23, seven suspected militants were killed and six seriously wounded during an anti-terror operation in Chitral district, according to a military press release.

Six football players abducted in Balochistan

On 09.09.23, six football players went missing in Dera Bugti district of Balochistan province. They were on their way from Dera Bugti to Sibi when armed men stopped their vehicle and abducted them at gunpoint. According to information published by the Ministry of Interior on 10.09.23, the perpetrators were allegedly members of the Balochistan Republican Army.

Palestinian Territories / Israel

Dead in West Bank raid

On 05.09.23, a Palestinian militant was killed by the Israeli army during a raid in the West Bank.

The militant Palestinian group Islamic Jihad later announced that the man had been one of its members. During the raid in the Nur Shams refugee camp near the town of Tulkarem, a firefight ensued between Israeli troops and armed Palestinians. According to the Israeli army, a cache of explosives was found and detonated. Local residents showed videos of bulldozers demolishing the asphalt of the entire main road of the camp.

In addition, a Palestinian minor was killed near the main road through the Jordan Valley after allegedly shooting at Israeli soldiers and wounding one of them. According to the Israeli military, the teenager had previously fired at a shopping centre in a nearby Israeli settlement.

Senegal

Dakar: Further bans on demonstrations; situation of freedom of demonstration

As in previous months (cf. BN of 24.07.23), the prefect of Dakar banned a registered demonstration by the opposition movement Mouvement des forces vives du Sénégal (F24), which includes over 100 political parties and civil society organisations. Once again, the reason given was the danger of disturbing public order and obstructing the free movement of people and goods. F24 had planned a demonstration at the Place de la Nation in Dakar for 08.09.23 to repeat its demand for the release of political prisoners, including the leading opposition leader Ousmane Sonko, who is in pre-trial detention. F24 criticised the ban - saying it was the fifth assembly ban imposed on F24 in less than three months. F24 called for peaceful protests at home and abroad on 10.09.23 in the form of "pot concerts" to make their voices heard against the repression and restriction of freedoms in Senegal.

According to Alioune Tine, former president of the Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (RADDHO) and former regional director at AI, opposition protests and press conferences have been systematically banned for months. This would remind of a state of emergency, he said.

Only recently, the prefect of Dakar banned a protest planned by the opposition movement Front for a Popular Anti-Imperialist Revolution and Pan African - France Dégage (FRAPP) around the member of parliament Guy Marius Sagna, and scheduled for 26.08.23 for the same reasons. Most recently, the police also prevented press conferences of the largest parliamentary opposition coalition Yewwi Askan Wi (YAW) (cf. BN of 14.08.23).

Situation of the freedom of the press; several journalists temporarily released

The regional director of the NGO ARTICLE 19 in Senegal, Alfred Bulakali, condemned many violations of press freedom since the COVID 19 pandemic. He deplored the violence against media professionals and institutions, as well as poorer working conditions for media professionals. Bulakali said that offences relating to press publications and defamation which have been cited by the police to summon several media representatives and make media workers' freedom of expression liable to prosecution, must be abolished.

The editor-in-chief of the news website Senego, Khalil Kamara, who was arrested for spreading false news, insulting the president and other offences, was released on 06.09.23 by order of the public prosecutor. The journalist's arrest had been related to an article published on Senego about opposition leader Sonko, which was not written by Kamara, the prosecutor said. AI country director, Seydi Gassama, criticised Kamara's arrest and called for the abolition of defamation offences. Media had reported the temporary arrest of a Senego journalist as early as mid-August 2023. Abdou Khadre Sakho had also been arrested for spreading false news and another offence, these charges were related to a post on Senego about the Sonko case, the reports said. Sakho had spoken of 'secret' negotiations regarding Sonko's release.

Contrary to previous reports, the hunger-striking columnist of the private channel Walf TV Cheikh Bara Ndiaye was not placed under judicial supervision on 24.07.23 (cf. BN of 31.07.23) but continued to be held in pre-trial detention following a successful complaint by the public prosecutor's office. According to unanimous media reports, Ndiaye was finally placed under judicial supervision on 31.08.23 subject to the same conditions. The journalist, charged with incitement to riot and other offences against public security, had been arrested in early June 2023 for comments on the recent verdict against opposition leader Sonko and the subsequent events of early June 2023 (cf. BN of 05.06.23).

Overcrowding and prison conditions at Rebeuss Central Prison in Dakar

According to AI Country Director Gassama, the Maison d'arrêt de Rebeuss in Dakar is considerably overcrowded and he called for relief. NGOs were unable to judge the current prison conditions in situ because the Ministry of

Justice had refused to grant NGOs access to the prison for a year, Gassama said. According to families and civil society, detainees are held in cramped quarters and have to sleep sitting up due to lack of space. According to Gassama, the prison conditions are inhumane and tantamount to torture.

Somalia

Civilians killed in suspected air strike

At least three civilians were killed during a military operation in the village of El-Lahelay (Galguduud region). There are different reports about the incident. According to local leaders, five civilians and three al-Shabaab fighters, who hid in a residential house, were killed in air strikes. According to the state-run Somali National News Agency (SONNA), three senior al-Shabaab leaders were killed, with no mention of the killing of the civilians. The United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), which supports the Somali military, including with drone strikes, confirmed the killing of the three fighters and civilians, but denied having flown air strikes or having been on the scene.

Sudan

Fighting continues

According to media reports, at least 32 civilians were killed by artillery fire from the Sudanese Army (SAF) in Omdurman on 05.09.23. The reports are based on statements by several witnesses and human rights activists that the army shelled a residential area. Already on 03.09.23, 19 people lost their lives due to shelling of a residential area. There are repeated reports of both the army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) attacking or bombing residential areas in Khartoum and other cities. Also, looting and wanton destruction of residential units by the RSF is repeatedly reported.

Furthermore, on 05.09.23, the RSF again attacked the barracks of an SAF armoured unit in Khartoum, which they had already attacked at the end of August 2023. In the course of time, the fighting also extended to the immediate vicinity of the barracks.

On 10.09.23, the so-called Goro market in the south of Khartoum was bombed, killing more than 35 people. According to the organisation Médecins Sans Frontières, more than 60 people were injured in the attack. It remains unclear who is responsible for the attack, as both SAF and RSF claim that the respective other party was responsible. Local aid organisations consider that responsibility for the attack rests with the SAF.

Due to human rights violations committed so far by members of the RSF, the US government imposed sanctions on the senior commander and brother of the leading commander of the RSF, Abdelrahim Hamdan Dagalo on 06.09.23. The sanctions cover all of Dagalo's assets and holdings located in the US or controlled by a US person.

Syria

Protests continue in Suwayda

Protests in the mainly Druze city of Suwayda which is controlled by the Damascus government, and several other cities in southern Syria have been going on for four weeks by now. While the protests were initially ignited over the abolition of a fossil fuel subsidy, videos of the protests now clearly show slogans from the "Arab Spring" and calls for the "fall of the regime". So far, there has been no violent response by Assad's troops.

Further fighting between SDF and militias

Contrary to announcements by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) that operations against various formerly allied groups had ceased, fighting still continues (cf. BN of 04.09.23). Most recently, on 10.09.23, a twelve-year-old girl died during a SDF raid in an Arab village.

Tanzania

Arrest of opposition members

On 10.09.23, several opposition activists, including the deputy leader of the opposition CHADEMA (Party for Democracy and Progress) Tundu Lissu, were reportedly arrested for unlawful assembly activities in northern Tanzania and released on bail a short time later. Lissu has criticised the government several times in the past and organised more political events by his party since the ban on political rallies was lifted by President Samia Suluhu Hassan (cf. BN of 16.01.23).

Türkiye

Suspected terrorist attack foiled

On 08.09.23, Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya announced that five terrorists from a separatist group had been arrested during an operation by security forces in the south-eastern Turkish province of Diyarbakır. According to media reports, the arrested persons are PKK members.

Reportedly, bomb-making materials and pentaerythritol tetranitrate (PETN), an explosive chemical, were found during the search of the suspects' homes.

According to information published by the Ministry of Defence on 07.09.23, Türkiye had killed or arrested more than 1,180 PKK or YPG members since the beginning of the year, including people who were in Iraq and northern Syria.

Uganda

First arrests and charges of "aggravated homosexuality".

According to media reports, two Ugandans in eastern Uganda have been charged with "aggravated homosexuality" and remanded in custody for the first time since the enactment of the Anti-Homosexuality Act at the end of May 2023. According to the respective public prosecutors in charge, one of the men is accused of engaging in a sexual act with a twelve-year-old boy, and the other of having an illicit sexual relationship with an adult man with disabilities. The proceedings are expected to last up to four years. Under the new law, they face the death penalty (cf. BN of 05.06.23). The last execution took place in 2005, currently a total of 145 persons are said to be on death row.

Ukraine

Civilian war victims (selection)

Russian shelling of the town centre of Kostyantynivka (Donetsk oblast), located about 25 km south-west of the embattled town of Bakhmut, killed at least 16 people and injured 33, according to information from Ukrainian sources of 06.09.23. An employee of an agricultural company was killed in ongoing drone attacks on the Odesa region, which particularly targeted the Danube seaport of Ismajil, the region's governor said on the same day. Russian attacks targeted Ismajil on several days. On 08.09.23, a Russian air strike on Odradokamyanka (Kherson oblast), located on the west bank of the Dnipro river, killed four people and injured three, according to Ukrainian sources. On the morning of 10.09.23, one person was injured in a drone strike on Kiev. The head of the local military administration urged the population to stay in shelters.

Further developments of the war effort

Direct fighting continues to be reported from the southern and eastern fronts. Advances have been made by Ukraine around the town of Bakhmut (Donetsk oblast). On 10.09.23 it was reported that two foreign humanitarian workers died and two others were injured when a projectile hit their vehicle nearby. The Ukrainian side also made further gains in the Zaporizhzhya region. The Ukrainian general staff also reported these advances later. In the east, however, the Ukrainian army was concentrating on repelling Russian advances, according to the commander of the

ground forces. An advance of Russian forces was noted by observers on the front line Kupyansk-Svatovsk-Kreminna (Kharkiv and Luhansk oblasts).

With reference to the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) own information, it was reported that IAEA experts stationed at the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant had heard explosions in the vicinity on several days since 02.09.23. There had been no damage to the nuclear power plant.

Minister of Defence replaced

After President Volodymyr Zelensky announced on 03.09.23 that former Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov would be dismissed, the parliament confirmed Rustem Umerov as his successor on 06.09.23. Umerov was previously head of the State Property Fund. According to media reports, Umerov's main task is to fight corruption within the army.

Oligarch Kolomoyskyi in pre-trial detention

Ihor Kolomoyskyi, a former supporter of President Zelensky, was remanded in custody on 02.09.23 and charged on suspicion of fraud on 07.09.23. According to media reports, he is accused of embezzling funds amounting to over EUR 233 million. Kolomoyskyi, owner of banks, energy companies, metal companies, airlines and one of the country's most influential TV stations, had been blacklisted along with his family members for corruption by the US State Department on 05.03.21 during his time as governor of the Dnipropetrovsk region. His arrest is interpreted as a signal sent internally and to Ukraine's international partners about the fight against corruption.

Elections in the occupied territories

From 08.09. to 10.09.23, the Russian Federation held regional and local elections in the occupied parts of the regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhya and Kherson, which had been declared annexed on 30.09.22. Such elections were held on its own territory at the same time. According to the electoral commission, United Russia won more than 70 % of the votes in all four annexed regions. The election was considered a violation of international law by the Council of Europe.

Venezuela

Controversial arrest and detention of student John Álvarez

On 30.08.23, John Kelvin Álvarez, a student and suspected Bandera Roja party member, was arrested. For the next 24 hours his whereabouts were unknown until he was brought before a court on 04.09.23. According to his lawyers, he is accused of conspiracy and links to the six trade union leaders convicted in a controversial trial in August (cf. BN of 07.08.23). He is currently in custody. His lawyers, relatives and various NGOs accused the security forces of using torture to coerce him to denounce others for crimes. Various actors described the arrest as arbitrary and warned of intensified repression of voices from civil society in the run-up to the next presidential elections.

A recent report by AI criticises arbitrary detention by the Venezuelan government as a politically motivated means of repressing critical voices, which continues to be used, and discusses its patterns. The report also lists nine specific cases from recent years and calls for the release of these individuals, including political activist and journalist Roland Carreño and human rights defender Javier Tarazona.

Yemen

Increase in measles and rubella

In a press release published on 31.08.23 WHO expressed concern about the increase in measles and rubella cases in Yemen.

According to WHO, more than 34,000 measles cases were reported between the beginning of January and the end of July 2023, 413 of which were fatal. This is a significant increase compared to 2022, when around 27,000 cases (220 fatal) were reported for the whole year. Younger children are particularly affected. The rising number of cases is caused by low vaccination rates and cramped living conditions in refugee camps, among other reasons. The Yemeni health system is functional to a limited extent only, especially since the outbreak of the conflict in 2014.

Médecins Sans Frontières: Contact lost with two staff members

On 28.08.23, the aid organisation Médecins Sans Frontières announced that it had lost contact with two staff members in the Marib governorate.

The staff members are nationals from Germany and Myanmar. While Médecins Sans Frontières did not provide further details, local media reported an abduction by several armed men on the road connecting Marib and Hadramaut governorates. Kidnappings of staff of international organisations are not uncommon in Yemen. As recently as mid-August 2023, five UN staff members were released after being held hostage for 18 months, following their abduction by al-Qaeda in February 2022.

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Briefing Notes

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